

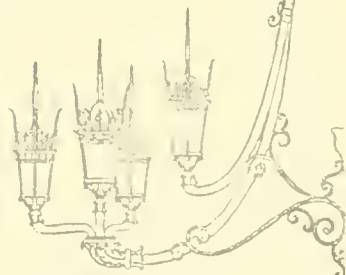
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# CHANGE AND GROWTH IN CENTRAL BOSTON



a publication of the  
Development Guidance Project  
of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce,  
and the Boston Society of Architects

May, 1984

*"The fundamental good is the continuous development of the individual or the small group and their culture: a process of becoming more complex, more richly connected, more competent, acquiring and realizing new powers -- intellectual, emotional, social, and physical. If human life is a continued state of becoming, then its continuity is founded on growth and development. . . . If development is a process of becoming more competent and more richly connected, then an increasing sense of connection to one's environment in space and in time is one aspect of growth. So that settlement is good which enhances the continuity of a culture and the survival of its people, increases a sense of connection in time and space, and permits or spurs individual growth: development, within continuity, via openness and connection."*

A THEORY OF GOOD CITY FORM (1981)

The Committee dedicates this report to the memory of Kevin Lynch whose ideas informed its decisions, and whose presence ennobled its proceedings. The spirit of his care for people and their cities will endure.



May, 1984

Attached is the report of the Development Guidance Project, a joint effort of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce and the Boston Society of Architects. It represents the work product of seven months of research, discussion and deliberation on matters involving growth and change in Central Boston.

There are several points about the report which we would like to stress. First, the document is intended to serve not as a definitive statement on the City's growth but as the first step toward a much-needed public debate of the issues that will determine the future shape of Boston.

Second, because the Committee is mindful of the proper role in development of a duly-elected government, this report calls upon Mayor Flynn to create, as quickly as possible, a process to facilitate the debate, to fix an overall vision for Boston, and to delineate fair and effective methods to achieve this image. The Committee also exhorts the private sector to support and participate in these efforts.

Third, the Committee endorses the growth principle and believes that further development can be accommodated within the downtown core if major physical change is encouraged toward the edges and corridors of the area.

Fourth, in order to illustrate where change might occur, and to portray the Committee's desire to conserve and enhance past development accomplishments, the report includes a growth map. This schematic, while neither precise nor boundary-specific, represents an approach to achieving the report's recommendations.

Fifth, the Committee urges that all those involved in development--both public and private--take great care to ensure that projects in Boston are especially well-designed so that they enhance the City's special character and unique qualities.

Finally, the Committee hopes that its work raises private sector awareness of the need for a constituency to marshal resources and expertise in order to ensure that the City's development measures up to Boston's traditions, needs and aspirations. Such a coalition could promote proper growth, hold the public sector accountable for its decisions, and inform the development actions of the private sector.

We ask the readers of this report to share their comments and criticisms with us. Let us begin to talk, work and plan around a common goal: growth that will best serve Boston and all its people.

Todd Lee, Commissioner of Design  
Boston Society of Architects

Joseph Breiteneicher, Chairman  
Development Guidance Project  
Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce

## DEVELOPMENT GUIDANCE PROJECT: CHANGE AND GROWTH IN CENTRAL BOSTON

### I. INTRODUCTION

Boston is experiencing an unprecedented era of new growth. For example, a recent Boston Redevelopment Authority report notes that in office development alone 14 million square feet of space were added to Central Boston\* between 1975 and 1983. Between 1981 and 1985, eleven major office buildings will have been completed in Central Boston. Over one million square feet per year are all but certain to be added over the next half decade.

The economic impact of this physical change has generally been viewed as positive. Jobs have been created, tax revenues generated and the critical mass of growth necessary to reinforce the image of an expanding and vital city has been established. But no overall vision for Boston has guided this growth and there are reasonable concerns that, if left undirected, further new development might dramatically diminish the character of Central Boston and severely threaten those qualities which have served to make the City an attractive one in which to live, work, and invest.

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\* Central Boston is defined in this report as the Boston peninsula stretching from Massachusetts Avenue to the harbor, and including the Fort Point Channel area and the South Boston industrial area.



Care for the future character of Central Boston, coupled with the clear recognition that growth and change must be encouraged to keep Boston vital, generated this report. These concerns led the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, through its BOSTON 2000 Committee, along with the Boston Society of Architects, to assemble a group representative of the various sectors involved in the central core to analyze and report on ways to foster appropriate growth in Central Boston.

This report focuses on the physical aspects of development and seeks to complement other City-wide activities which are addressing questions of economic and social import. It delineates the Committee's findings and recommendations regarding growth--how to ensure that the development momentum enhances life throughout the City of Boston . It is a statement by and for the City's private sector on further development in Central Boston and is also offered as an aid to the new City Administration as it plans for Boston's future.

The report is not intended to serve as a definitive statement on the City's growth but rather as the private sector's first step to help initiate a much-needed public debate of the issues which will determine the shape of future Boston. Both the text and the attached map are conceptual in approach in order to spark a process that facilitates debate, fixes an overall vision of Boston and delineates methods to achieve this image. It is also intended to point out the need for the formation of an on-going coalition of public, private and community interests to ensure that the City's future development measures up to Boston's tradition, needs and aspirations.

## The Project

In September, 1983, the Development Guidance Project Advisory Committee was convened. The group's goals were to find appropriate methods to:

- \*encourage and direct growth;
- \*enhance and protect the City's quality of life;
- \*build public confidence in the City's development decision-making process;
- \*ensure openness on development-related public policy issues;
- \*achieve quality of design--both in new construction and in reuse projects;
- \*enhance Boston's special qualities: historic, pedestrian, waterfront-related, and the like;
- \*provide clarity and predictability for the development community;
- \*guide development in Central Boston so that it serves the needs of all Bostonians and furthers prospects for revitalization and conservation of the City's neighborhoods; and,
- \*promote effective collaboration between the public and private sectors in protecting and upgrading Boston's built environment.

The Committee's deliberations were based on the following central beliefs and premises:

- \*physical change in the urban environment is inevitable and growth is desirable to maintain the City's economic competitiveness;
- \*continued development in Central Boston should benefit the City as a whole as well as the greater Boston area;
- \*areas still exist within Central Boston where new growth can be located to provide significant gains without adversely affecting existing neighborhoods, areas of special historic or architectural character or infrastructure capacity; and
- \*effective and fair governmental policies and rules for development in Central Boston can be arrived at through a public process.

This Committee's work builds on a foundation of earlier efforts by BOSTON 2000, the Boston Society of Architects and the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) and is complemented by recent and forthcoming BRA research and policy documents. Specifically, it has reaffirmed the appropriateness of the fourteen policy guidelines for Central Boston's development discussed in the 1981 BOSTON 2000 document, "Boston Guidelines for Development." This report, however, moves on from that earlier identification of policy guidelines and makes specific recommendations to plan for and direct Central Boston's physical growth.

#### Findings

\* Boston faces a growth challenge: policies which, in the past, have served effectively to generate development must now be rethought and reshaped to prevent the destruction of those qualities which have made Boston so attractive a place for residential, employment, investment, or visitor activity.

\* An up-to-date, publicly agreed-upon plan or vision for the City's growth to guide both public and private actions does not presently exist.

\* Public sector development decisions have not been based on a publicly-acknowledged planning context for Central Boston and adequate concern for the unique character and requirements of its various, diverse districts.



\* Although much of the City's physical change has been positive, it has occurred with limited citizen participation. Such participation is needed to help better determine the impacts of development on the public environment and to improve prospects for meeting public goals.

\* The potentially constructive guiding force of the most powerful regulatory tool available to the City--the Boston Zoning Ordinance--can be a far more effective tool than it has been, particularly in Central Boston.

\* Overall criteria or guidelines for development in Central Boston do not now exist as a basis for review, approval or appeal of individual development projects.

\* Boston, which has used a revitalized central core to spur its overall revival, must now encourage growth in areas other than the present Financial and Retail Districts.

\* There needs to be a carefully managed connection between development and the City's long-term capacity--infrastructure, public transit, and access--to absorb future growth.

\* The City has neither consistently encouraged nor always captured the best designed and most appropriate development.

\* Despite the evident contribution that Boston's historical and architecturally-significant buildings make to the City's sense of scale and

overall quality, preservation has fallen short of its potential as an effective planning tool.

\* The City has not coordinated effectively its development decisions with those federal and state agencies that also have a significant impact on Central Boston.

## II. PLANNING FOR CHANGE AND GROWTH: Creating an Up-to-Date Vision

At this stage in the City's growth much as was the case in the early 1960s--also a period of rapid growth--there is a strong and compelling need to establish a new overall vision for Central Boston. This vision must establish goals and a clear image in the minds of Boston's citizens about the physical, social and economic qualities being sought for the City as it approaches the end of the century.

The Committee calls for:

1) Creation and adoption of a plan by which to guide further development activity in Central Boston as a whole and for its various districts.

2) A dialogue between the citizens and the City Administration as the basis for plan formulation and adoption. The plan must not only reflect consensus among public, private and community interests but involve these interests at the outset in the shaping of the vision and in its implementation.

3) A plan that requires certain immutable values--access to light and sun, usable open space, views and vistas, waterfront and public pedestrian access, among others--be recognized in all development decisions.

4) A plan that includes design guidelines for all areas within Central Boston with provisions tailored to the special qualities of each district. These guidelines should be created in consultation with the constituencies of each district and be generated for public review.



5) A plan that:

-Designates "Priority Growth Areas" where major growth will be encouraged, even if departing from existing bulk and density patterns.

-Designates "Moderate Growth Areas" where new growth will be supported, so long as it carefully respects the existing context of scale and density .

-Designates "Restricted Growth Areas" where development will be limited to rehabilitation, small-scale infill, and building replacement with no net increase in bulk.

-Designates "Conservation Areas" where the predominantly residential character, and existing scale and density of the area are to be preserved and protected.

-Designates a single "Waterfront Planning Area" where development and change can continue to be encouraged but only under the specific requirements of a comprehensive, integrated plan covering all of Boston's waterfront areas.

-Designates "Open Space Areas" that are protected and developed in accordance with the requirements of a comprehensive open space plan for Boston and especially sought in conjunction with major, new development.

-Designates "Special Preservation Districts" as areas within Central Boston whose character is enhanced by the existence of a significant number of historically, culturally or architecturally-significant

buildings. Such areas have been identified in the draft "Downtown Preservation Study" by the Boston Landmarks Commission.

-Strengthens the connections between the neighborhoods and Central Boston through activity, visual, and access linkages.

6) Establishment of comprehensive performance goals and criteria for specific areas within Central Boston to set forth desirable objectives for building siting and design. At a minimum, these standards should set requirements for:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| -sunlight and daylight   | -district character and scale   |
| -street-level wind protection  | -use mix  |
| -access:<br>pedestrian - sidewalk standards<br>vehicular - traffic and parking<br>transit - bus and transit routes | -sense of connection with past<br><br>-relationship to natural features |
| -views and view corridors  | -noise  |
| -open space requirements   | -air pollution  |
| -parking   | -safety   |
| -street-level activity   | -groundwater and sewage   |
| -public amenities provision  | -energy consumption   |
| -physical relationship of<br>the building to the street  | -water access and views.  |

7) Consideration of Boston's interrelationship with the region in guiding and shaping Central Boston's development.

8) Early on in the planning process, the perspectives of state and federal agencies which play key decision-making roles in the City's growth should be sought out. Their active support should also be sought for implementation of the vision.

## Future Boston: An Approach

To test its descriptive criteria for the shape and scope of future Boston against the practical realities of the landscape, the Committee has attempted to lay out the beginning of a physical growth plan. It has prepared a map designating where the six development areas previously identified should apply. This map has been drawn to represent an emerging consensus on where Central Boston is in serious danger of being overbuilt, where development should be encouraged and where it should proceed with great care.

The map is intended to be illustrative rather than definitive and to indicate where new policy directions are most needed. It is intended as a point of departure, not as a final blueprint. It depicts values for change in each area rather than maximum development limits or bulk. The map's importance lies chiefly in its principles, and the illustration that those principles are workable when applied in Central Boston.

"Workable", among other things, means being able to accommodate projected growth by directing it to locations where it will not adversely affect existing and desired qualities, and by managing its design. Given this guidance, there should be no need to curtail growth in Central Boston or have it diminished ultimately by market response to deteriorated conditions. An additional 15 million square feet of office and retail floor space are projected for Central Boston by 1990. All of this growth could, if necessary, be accommodated in the seven million square feet of land available for new develop-



ment in the "Priority Development Areas" identified in this report. All of it can be accommodated, without encouraging adverse effects, in some combination of development between these areas and the "Moderate Growth Areas" where 16 million square feet of land are available for future development.

Finally, there are certain development-related concerns, not easily shown on a map, which the Committee feels should be integral parts of all growth decisions for every area of Central Boston:

- \*the preservation of historically or architecturally-significant buildings, assemblages of buildings, and districts;

- \*the guidance of all development by established performance goals and standards; and,

- \*the creation and/or improvement of open space and access.

#### (1) Priority Growth Areas

Central Boston has a number of areas where development can appropriately take place at scale and densities substantially above those presently existing or zoned. Development in these areas establishes a new development context rather than being strictly patterned on what exists, although there may be existing buildings of merit which should be retained within sites. These areas provide the potential for accommodating major growth in Central Boston. Priority Development Areas should be designated as locations where:

- \* access is now adequate by foot, transit, or auto, and can still be adequate following major growth;

- \* the City's valued assets of historically or architecturally important

buildings, open space, and the waterfront would not be threatened; and

\* existing neighborhoods would not be disrupted if adjacent residential communities have a significant role in development planning.

Four such areas are:

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| -The Essex Street Corridor   | -The North Station area                                     |
| -The Fort Point Channel area | -The South Station area and<br>nearby potential air rights. |

The City should designate such areas as its highest priority for encouraging major, higher-intensity growth and development of a scale that cannot be adequately supported elsewhere. The City should then back that designation with actions: scheduling public facilities investments to support new growth, actively soliciting appropriate development, revising codes to allow the growth to occur, and adopting careful guidelines for its shaping, including preservation plans where appropriate.

## (2) Moderate Growth Areas

Central Boston has other areas where new development should also be encouraged but only with careful recognition of the limitations on height, bulk, use and design imposed by the existing context. New building can add to existing levels of density and activity, but only moderately, and not exceeding the bounds of height and bulk established by either existing development or, where more restrictive, current zoning. There may also be existing buildings or groups of buildings within these areas which should be retained for their architectural or historical merit or their urban design role. These areas should be designated as locations that:

\*are basically attractive to development, with the promise of results in return for City efforts;

\*have access and other services, existing or programmed, which can support additional development though not at the level of "Priority Development Areas";

\*are capable of accepting moderate bulk additions without unreasonable impacts on light, wind, and established scale;

\*have an established context which provides a basis for measuring consistency of new proposals, and can accommodate some change without destruction of existing character.

Ten such areas are:

- Boylston Street corridor
- Portions of Arlington and Stuart Streets
- South Cove
- Harrison Avenue, Albany Street, the New York Streets area
- Cambridge Street
- Any future Central Artery air rights
- South Boston industrial transition area
- Park Plaza and portions of the Theatre District
- The lower portion of Government Center (nearest the Central Artery).
- The Bulfinch Triangle.

The City should make clear that "Moderate Growth Areas" share with the "Priority Development Areas" the first claim on City efforts to encourage



development in Central Boston. Most of these areas abut neighborhoods having a strong history of planning involvement. Together with those neighborhoods, the City should develop careful design controls, adjust zoning regulations to realistic and supportable limits, and program the necessary capital facility improvements to service added demands.

### (3) Restricted Growth Areas

Central Boston has other areas where added demands on access, light, air and scale, or impact on architectural character are unsupportable. In these areas, continuation of past intensity of growth would be damaging, not beneficial. These areas should be designated as locations where:

- \*access is overburdened, and remedies are not in sight, and/or
- \*"canyonization" and loss of human scale has already progressed too far, and/or
- \*destruction of existing character or district qualities is threatened.

Four such areas are:

- The Financial District
- The Retail Core
- The upper portion of Government Center (closest to Center Plaza)
- The Blackstone Block/Quincy Market/Haymarket area.

The City should state that encouragement of investment in these areas will primarily be limited to conservation, rehabilitation and replacement of existing bulk. New development, possibly even major new development, would still be possible in such areas but only with strict adherence to present,

written density rules and/or emerging zoning policies. A plan indicating certain loci where additional FAR might be permitted, based on performance standards to achieve the appropriate additional FAR, should be developed. Other possible exceptions could be made in transition areas and as the result of boundary adjustments.

#### (4) The Waterfront

Boston's waterfront and abutting land should be designated as a special district, and planned as an integrated whole. Comprehensive design guidelines should relate the parts of the waterfront to each other as well as to the districts they abut.

This waterfront district must include, at a minimum, the Charles River Esplanade, the North Station waterfront, areas abutting the North End, the Waterfront Park area to Harbor Towers, Rowes and Foster's Wharf, the entire periphery of the Fort Point Channel, and the emerging harborside areas of South Boston. Waterfronts in Charlestown and East Boston which are functionally and visually connected to these areas should be included in a coordinated approach in waterfront planning and development.

The City should designate its waterfront areas and apply special rules to them, drawing on the strong example of the Rowes and Foster's Wharf design guidelines. Pedestrian access to the waterfront should be assured, and visual corridors set aside. Only those uses taking special advantage of a waterfront location should normally be allowed, such as those which depend on water access (fishing, marinas), or which draw people to see and appreciate the waterfront and build a constituency for it.

#### (5) Open Spaces

Growing intensity of use in Central Boston creates increased demands for open space. The City should declare as policy that additions of bulk in Central Boston must be accompanied by related additions of useable open space. It should also declare support for innovative public/private efforts to create and manage such spaces, as achieved at Winthrop and Post Office Squares and planned for Copley Square, and establish clear maintenance agreements. In addition to providing for the creation and management of new open spaces, the City should develop rules precluding destruction of existing open space.

Open space areas identified on the map represent either existing public open space or areas where open space should be created in conjunction with major new area development, in which case open space designations on the map are not intended to be site specific.

#### (6) Conservation Areas

In the remaining areas of Central Boston, careful planning and control are no less important than in those areas already discussed. However, major change from recent policies or practices is neither necessary nor likely given the relative strength of neighborhood constituencies, firmly established area character, the existence of local historic district protection, or the absence of development pressure.

Existing conditions, however, do not guarantee conservation of the residential and/or design character of these areas. The City should, therefore: establish policy for these areas assuring that existing bulk, density, and the

built environment will be preserved consistent with goals and objectives developed by each district constituency; and provide strong planning support to assure this outcome.

The eight areas within Central Boston are:

\*South End

\*North End

\*West End

\*Bay Village

\*Chinatown

\*Beacon Hill

\*Leather District

\*Back Bay.

#### (7) Access

The benefits of development in Central Boston are dependent, in part, upon the impact of this growth on the quality of access by foot, transit and car within Central Boston; between Central Boston and nearby neighborhoods; and between Central Boston and the larger region to which it relates.

How that access is provided is crucial to the character of Central Boston, and needs to be integrated into project, district and City-wide planning. Properly located and designed, development can do more than simply add to access demands; it can contribute to access improvement. Development can open pedestrian access (as has occurred on the waterfront), improve transit access (as proposed at North and South Stations), make improved parking possible, and reduce dependency on single-occupancy autos by designating preferred parking for efficient uses such as carpools. All of these objectives should be reflected in both public and private planning and project design in Central Boston.

#### (8) City Entrances

Central Boston has visually dramatic approaches from almost every direction: the Southeast Expressway, the Tobin Bridge, the Charles River Bridge, the Massachusetts Turnpike, and the numerous MBTA lines. In most cases, reconstruction of these approaches or nearby development is likely in the near future, creating great opportunities for their enhancement. Improving the entrance views of Boston should be a consideration in the design of roadway alignments, in design controls for nearby areas, and in the provision of landscaping and screening to create an attractive foreground.



### III. MANAGING CHANGE AND GROWTH: Creating New Processes

It is not enough to articulate a vision of how Boston should change. It is also necessary that processes for achieving that vision be developed. With the strength in the regional economy, substantial new growth is expected to occur in Boston. The City needs to gain control of this growth, and the private investment community needs to know how public sector planning will be undertaken and administrative decisions will be made. Boston must now examine and reconsider how its existing development-related agencies, and land use and regulatory policies guide and manage growth.

As part of its work, the Development Guidance Project Advisory Committee studied the processes by which development plans and decisions are formulated and carried out in Boston. Those qualities needed in Boston's planning and development system are elaborated below along with recommendations to improve the present system. Several public policy areas which need further study and revision are also delineated.

#### Objectives for Public Sector Development Guidance

Establishing renewed public confidence in how the public sector administers and regulates development in Boston is a critical need facing the new City Administration. Five essential qualities should be pursued:

- \*openness

- \*fairness

\*predictability

\*ability to promote established goals and plans for change--especially those which must now be drawn, and

\*flexibility--the ability to allow for changing needs and circumstances.

In addition, to improve the manner in which the public sector guides, administers and manages development in Boston, five steps are essential:

- (1) Communicate an explicit vision
- (2) Reform the City's zoning system
- (3) Strengthen the role of historic preservation
- (4) Improve case-by-case project review
- (5) Develop an integrated capital facilities planning process and plan.

#### Communicate an Explicit Vision

The Committee has stated in the preceding section that there must be a publicly debated and agreed-upon vision of what "serves the City well". The image which results must be clearly articulated and broadly communicated, especially to the development community.

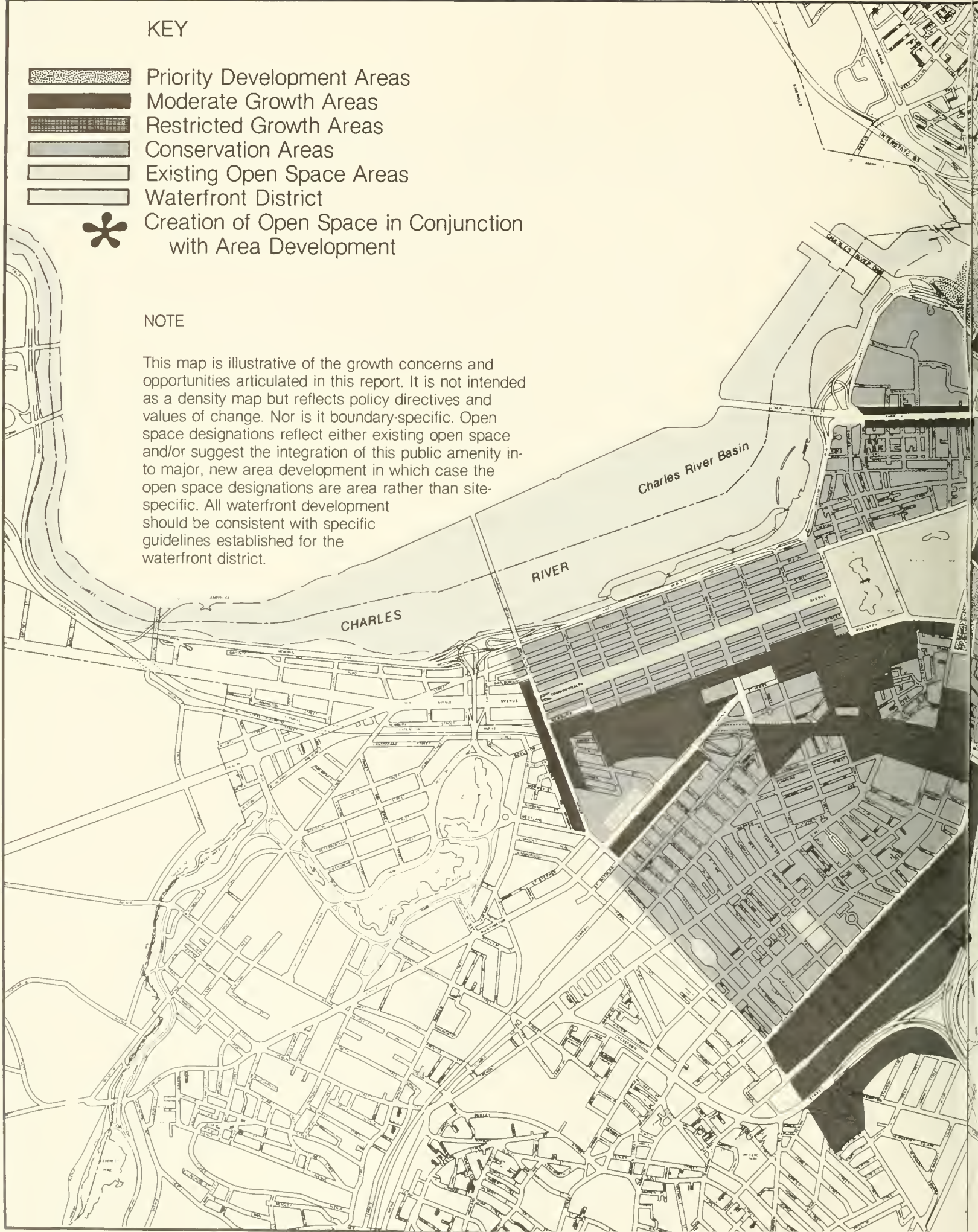
There should be a published document(s) giving direction and consistency to this vision to guide both public and private planning and development. Such a document(s) should identify basic premises about important City and Central Boston qualities and focus on actions and directions for change. The earlier part of this report is a beginning toward such a vision.

## KEY

-  Priority Development Areas
-  Moderate Growth Areas
-  Restricted Growth Areas
-  Conservation Areas
-  Existing Open Space Areas
-  Waterfront District
-  Creation of Open Space in Conjunction with Area Development

## NOTE

This map is illustrative of the growth concerns and opportunities articulated in this report. It is not intended as a density map but reflects policy directives and values of change. Nor is it boundary-specific. Open space designations reflect either existing open space and/or suggest the integration of this public amenity into major, new area development in which case the open space designations are area rather than site-specific. All waterfront development should be consistent with specific guidelines established for the waterfront district.





BOSTON  
INNER  
HARBOR

BOSTON INNER HARBOR

Fort Point Channel



## Reform the City's Zoning System

To more fully take advantage of zoning's potential for equitably directing growth, three major changes in Boston's zoning system are crucial: revision of the ordinance and map so that they reflect the real and current intent of City planning and policy; provision of clear criteria for flexibility in the zoning system; and a new reliance on how development and locations perform (performance standards), rather than on categorical prohibitions.

### 1. Clearly Reflect Intent

Central Boston was generally "underzoned", with limits on use, height and bulk more restrictive than was the City's real policy intent. As a result, on a case-by-case basis, major new development in Central Boston has sought and received relief through discretionary use of "escape clauses" built into the legislated ordinance.

Belief now exists that zoning limits can readily be bypassed. This expectation is capitalized into land values, making conforming development impossible and administrative relief almost inevitable. Thus, the potential use of zoning to protect areas where speculation threatens district qualities is undermined. It also deters the use of modern zoning-related devices such as incentive bonuses or development rights transfer which require developers to make specified trade-offs in order to earn development bonuses.

By saying what the City intends, zoning can allow development to be governed in a policy-consistent and predictable way under a system of rules,



rather than by allowing exceptions to adopted regulations. Such a system gives developers and propertyowners "fair warning" of what is expected .

Reflecting current intent involves revision of both the zoning text and the zoning map. Both deserve thorough study and well-analyzed revision, considering in each case of change the whole range of concerns: infrastructure, existing development context, preservation values, development opportunities, and any instabilities which change might introduce.

## 2. Allow Flexibility within the Zoning System

The ability to allow for carefully justified and supportable changes in, and departures from, the zoning ordinance and map is important. There will always be situations in which literal application of the zoning requirements to a parcel may properly be relaxed to accommodate a particular proposal that would contribute to the public benefit.

For example, some appropriate conditions for increasing the density of a parcel--so long as the performance criteria for environmental impact is observed--might include:

- \*Purchase and transfer of development rights from nearby private properties; and

- \*Purchase of open space nearby the parcel to be developed, and its dedication to the public use.

Further, the City may find it in the public interest to offer incentives to developers to undertake projects which they might not otherwise consider. Some appropriate incentives to develop--within the zoning rules--include:

- \*Alternatives to the typical property tax
- \*Tax agreements to promote public policy, such as historic preservation
- \*Mixed uses
- \*Planned unit developments
- \*Provision of easements, especially along the waterfront.

Any allowances for change and flexibility in, and departures from, Boston's zoning must, however, be linked to a system which establishes clear and consistent grounds for these departures, has pre-established policies, and makes the outcomes more predictable.

### 3. Create a Performance-based System

The establishment of a set of criteria as to how individual developments must perform is urgently needed for Boston. These performance standards must aim at protecting those important qualities of an area or parcel and more closely tie the potential impacts of new development to project design. For example, prescriptive standards of height, bulk and setback are intended to protect access to light at the street level. In some cases, however, such standards actually provide disincentives for the kind of building shape or materials which would better serve the objective of protecting light. A performance-based system would measure attainment of a prescribed level of light at street level, rather than establish an arbitrary, and possibly counter-productive, height/setback rule.

The B.R.A. has begun studies of building performance in relation to sunlight, daylight, wind, and air quality. That effort deserves the highest

priority, extension into other topical areas such as all forms of access, and rapid integration into the zoning structure. Adoption of a performance-based system will improve upon many of the categorical rules which now control what gets built rather than more directly controlling the effects of what gets built.

### Strengthen the Role of Historic Preservation

Predictability and consistency in the actions of the Boston Landmarks Commission is a pressing need along with a process which integrates preservation concerns into the City's planning and development processes. Thus, the following four steps are recommended:

#### 1. Review City Policies /Regulations as They Relate to Preservation

City land use policies and regulations should not provide an invitation or incentives to demolish significant buildings and replace them with structures having considerably greater floor-area-ratios and height.

#### 2. Link the City's Preservation and Planning Processes

Integration of preservation into both City-wide and Central Boston development goals, plans and policies has not been accomplished. Most recently, the Commission has had to fight ad hoc policy battles and review the broader issues of building height and density in addition to architectural/historic quality. For these reasons, the Boston Landmarks Commission should be actively involved in the formulation of the overall vision for Central Boston and the creation of City-wide and district plans and public policies.

### 3. Review and Revise the Boston Landmarks Commission's Statutes

At present, the Boston Landmarks Commission does not have the tools in its existing statute which can best link preservation with planning goals. The present landmark statute prohibits establishment of historic districts within Central Boston. This prohibition should be removed. Such change will permit new infill development to be mixed with rehabilitation. District-wide review will be particularly useful in areas such as the Downtown Crossing, Leather District, Bulfinch Triangle and Broad Street area.

### 4. Create Public Incentives for Preservation

The transfer of development rights (TDR) should be considered as one possible method for encouraging preservation in Boston. In essence, this allows development rights not used on one site to be transferred for use on another. Pressure to demolish or add stories to historic properties may thus be relieved without unreasonably stripping away site value.

However, transfer of development rights is not without its problems. Although TDR laws proliferate, their actual use does not. There are formidable legal, administrative and real estate market problems involved. With comprehensive new City planning policies and a strengthened zoning system in place, the TDR concept should be explored further as a possible and effective growth management tool for Boston.

### Improve Case-by-Case Project Review

Development projects in Boston involving tens of millions of dollars have become routine and more than \$100 million riding on a single development-related decision is no longer extraordinary. Development projects of these magnitudes inevitably require case-by-case consideration and review. No conceivable management system could, in advance, make all the necessary decisions about them. Consistent guidelines by which individual projects are to be judged, approved, and undertaken should be developed. These criteria must be mindful of the newly-created planning vision.

In the disposition of publicly-owned parcels, guidelines should be established by all interested parties in each district--neighborhood constituencies, public agencies, businesses and institutions. Based upon this process, guidelines should be refined prior to their use as a basis for competitive developer submission.

Prior to developer selection, there should be an opportunity for public review and comment on the submitted development proposals. Ultimate authority for developer selection, however, should remain with the appropriate public agency. A firmly established action schedule should be maintained which enables active development progress to follow the developer selection process with reasonable promptness.



## Develop an Integrated Capital Facilities Planning Process and Plan

Both private development and City-wide growth can be powerfully influenced by how public money is spent on public buildings, street improvements, open space, transportation and the like. Recent examples include the extension of the Red Line, the City's initial investment in the preservation of Quincy Market and the placement of the State Transportation Building in Park Square. To make the most effective use of the City's fiscal power requires a firm vision of what the City can and should become, and a firm grasp on the City's capital budget process. Determination, imagination and ingenuity are needed to take maximum advantage of local, state and federal funding for capital improvements.

A public facilities program--establishing where and under what circumstances scarce public funds will be spent for capital improvements--is vitally needed. Capital spending must be keyed to the vision, made consistent and predictable, and tied to both publicly and privately initiated development. For example, locations for "Priority Development Areas" should be selected taking into account the adequacy of public facilities, but in each case commitment for new capital improvements is likely to be an essential step in realizing hoped-for development. Large-scale development south of the Fort Point Channel clearly hinges on improved access both by car and transit.

A well-designed and aggressively implemented capital facilities program would give greater certainty to Boston's fiscal needs and allow neighborhoods and City agencies to plan responsibly for growth and change. It can also obtain the most benefit from private development through a process which joins

both the public and private sectors in providing amenities. One Winthrop Square is an example of what can be achieved through a thoughtful and well-integrated capital improvements plan--improvements to the Square and rehabilitation of the building were an integrated action with the public space costs shared in a unprecedented way.

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Schools, fire and police stations and libraries are important elements of a public facilities plan where residential areas predominate. Public transportation and street improvements must have priority in areas where growth is to be encouraged. Finally, open space acquisition and waterfront improvements should also be included in the capital improvements plan.

The BRA has just completed the first phase of an infrastructure planning effort aimed at improved coordination of capital planning between provider agencies, and coordination of capital improvements with development planning. This effort should be supported and brought forward into a comprehensive City capital facilities plan.

#### IV. ESTABLISHING INTERIM ACTIONS

The Committee recognizes that determination of an image and creation of a planning context for Central Boston as well as its individual districts--along with new policies for implementation--are no small undertaking. They will take a substantial amount of time and effort; more time than is desirable given current development pressures. Thus, interim public policy approaches are urgently needed. The following are recommended:

1) Developers and public officials alike should be put "on notice" that the manner in which development is planned, approved and administered is already changing. Notice should be given that the entire land use policy of Central Boston is being reconsidered, and all those seeking application should understand that a policy process is underway which could legitimately have an impact upon the maximum use to which any particular building or parcel may be put.

2) Projects already approved and those having preliminary public approval should proceed based upon existing City procedures and consistent with emerging public policies and planning-related efforts.

3) Seven existing documents (in addition to this one) reflecting growth concerns and illustrative visions of Boston should be required reading for those who wish to propose or regulate development projects for Central Boston:

- "Boston Tomorrow: Issues of Development" (BRA)
- "Boston Tomorrow: Draft Development Policies" (BRA)

- "Boston 2000 Guidelines for Development" (Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce)
- "Boston Harbor--Challenges and Opportunities for the 1980's" (BRA)
- "Economic Strategy Plan--Downtown Crossing" (BRA)
- "Parking Demand Study" (BRA)
- Draft "Downtown Preservation Study" (Boston Landmarks Commission).

4) Written guidelines should be prepared and broadly communicated for each new developer selection in the disposition of public property. The guidelines should provide for public review and comment, and should be used as the basis for proposal review. To this end, where formal citizen advisory committees do not now exist, particularly in the Downtown Crossing and Financial Districts, they should be constituted.

5) The City Administration should endorse and support design review measures, district guidelines and public policy recommendations currently being developed by the Boston Redevelopment Authority. The draft performance standards should be used as a tool by the City in the development review process for both public and private projects.

6) The Boston Landmarks Commission's "Downtown Preservation Study" should be finalized including the designation of buildings whose demolition or major alteration would be categorically prohibited and buildings whose retention would be strongly encouraged through incentives.

7) Wherever City discretion is called for, the exercise of that discretion should be based on the emerging understanding of performance relationships. Present zoning limits of a maximum floor-area-ratio of 10, and the unwritten

height limit of a maximum 40-story construction (or such lesser height and density as consistent with emerging performance standards) should be enforced for the whole of Central Boston.

8) The private sector should consider the establishment of a broad-based coalition to marshal resources and expertise in order to ensure that development in Boston measures up to the City's traditions, needs and aspirations.



## V. SUMMARY OF MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this document the Committee has offered suggestions for improving physical change and development in Central Boston. The following re-states, as recommendations, those matters which deserve public attention and action as well as private support and participation.

1) The City should create an overall vision for Central Boston; one which reflects today's needs and tomorrow's opportunities. The image which results should be clearly articulated and broadly communicated.

2) The Flynn Administration, drawing on the vast reservoir of talented and committed people active in Boston and representative of the community's various sectors, should immediately establish a Citizen's Committee to assist it in articulating and implementing the vision.

3) This vision for Boston should be translated into a plan establishing goals and clear imagery about the physical, social and economic qualities being sought.

4) The plan should require that certain immutable values--access to light and sun, usable open space, views and vistas, waterfront and public pedestrian access, among others--be recognized in all development decisions.

5) The plan should include design guidelines for all areas within Central Boston with provisions tailored to the special qualities of each district. These guidelines should be created in consultation with the constituencies of each district and be generated for public review.

6) The plan should:

- Designate "Priority Growth Areas" where major growth will be encouraged, even if departing from existing bulk and density patterns.

- Designate "Moderate Growth Areas" where new growth will be supported, so long as it carefully respects the existing context of scale and density.

- Designate "Restricted Growth Areas" where development will be limited to rehabilitation, small-scale infill, and building replacement with no net increase in bulk.

- Designate "Conservation Areas" where the predominantly residential character and existing scale and density of the area are to be preserved and protected.

- Designate a single "Waterfront Planning Area" where development and change can continue to be encouraged but only under the specific requirements of a comprehensive, integrated waterfront plan covering all of Boston's waterfront areas.

- Designate "Open Space Areas" that are protected and developed in accordance with the requirements of a comprehensive open space plan for Boston and especially sought in conjunction with major, new development.

-Designate "Special Preservation Districts" as districts within Central Boston whose character is enhanced by the existence of a significant number of historically, culturally or architecturally significant buildings or assemblages of buildings.

-Strengthen the connections between the neighborhoods and Central Boston through activity, visual, and access linkages.

7) Major new development should be encouraged in areas other than the Financial and Retail Districts toward the edges of these areas and beyond.

8) There should be consistent guidelines by which individual projects are judged and approved, all accomplished within the context of the overall vision.

9) Guidelines for development projects should be in the form of a performance-based system tied to the most appropriate design and use theme.

10) At a minimum, performance standards should set requirements for:

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|--|---|
| -sunlight and daylight   | -district character and scale   |
| -street-level wind protection  | -use mix  |
| -access:<br>pedestrian - sidewalk standards<br>vehicular - traffic and parking<br>transit - bus and transit routes | -sense of connection with past<br><br>-relationship to natural features |
| -views and view corridors  | -noise  |
| -open space requirements   | -air pollution  |
| -parking   | -safety   |
| -street-level activity   | -groundwater and sewage   |
| -public amenities provision  | -energy consumption   |
| -physical relationship of<br>the building to the street  | -water access and views.  |

11) Developers should have as much "as-of-right" flexibility as possible in carrying out a project but within the parameters of the contextual needs and requirements of districts, and of the City's planning and permitting processes.

12) The City should overhaul and rework its development decision-making process so as to create and ensure its openness, fairness, predictability, flexibility, and ability to promote established goals and plans for change.

13) The Boston Zoning Ordinance and Map should be revised to ensure their predictability, consistency with emerging policy choices, and clear grounds for granting of departures or exceptions.

14) The statutes of the Boston Landmarks Commission should be revised and strengthened to provide the necessary tools to encourage both building and district rehabilitation and district designation in Central Boston.

15) Preservation should be linked to the overall vision and incorporated into the City's planning process.

16) New public incentives should be developed to encourage preservation.

17) An integrated capital facilities planning process and plan should be developed and implemented consistent with the planning vision.

18) The City needs to consider Boston's interrelationship with the region in guiding and shaping Central Boston's development.

19) State and federal agencies have played key decision-making roles in the City's growth. Their perspectives should be heard early in the planning process and their active support sought for implementation of the vision.

#### Interim Actions

The Committee recognizes that determination of an image and creation of a planning context for Central Boston as well as its individual districts--along with new policies for implementation--are no small undertaking. They will take a substantial amount of time and effort; more time than is desirable given current development pressures. Thus, interim public policy approaches are urgently needed. The following are recommended:

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## VI. CONCLUSION

The Development Guidance Project Advisory Committee has sought in its discussions and in this document to begin to construct an image of Boston in future time--next month, next year, a generation from now--and to recommend how that image might be effectively implemented.

The Committee took action now and explicitly spelled out its analysis regarding past development practices and its hopes and concerns for the future because the group strongly feels that Boston has entered a watershed period in its rich history.

The public process of guiding and administering development in Boston has not been predictable, nor have there been accepted, long-term plans for growth which have been available for public debate or as a source of direction for developers and investors. In the present context of rapid economic and physical change, the likelihood of potentially destructive development decisions is very high if public sector guidance mechanisms do not keep pace with the needs of the City and its people.

It is essential that the public environment for development be structured so that public and private objectives may reach a proper balance. With appropriate public policies worked into a sound regulatory system, projected growth ought not to overwhelm Central Boston's access capacity, infrastructure,

pedestrian quality or special character. Without such guidance irreversible damage--already visible in some cases--will continue.

Just as the City Administration must provide public leadership in managing growth, it is equally important for the development sector to appreciate and be sensitive to the fragility of the special qualities of the Boston peninsula; to recognize that public goals must be served in the pursuit of private interests and that well-conceived public goals enhance private objectives.

As reported, the Committee feels that continued growth is crucial and that Central Boston can absorb the 25% increase in floor space projected to the end of this decade. The challenge, then, is how and where this new growth occurs. The Committee outlined, in this report, an approach to the task of accommodating growth without sacrificing the special qualities or fabric of the City.

The Committee hopes that its preliminary work will raise additional questions and generate further research, and that its efforts assist in framing what must be a public debate and in determining an appropriate course for both public and private actions. Boston deserves development which enhances the City as a whole and promotes the well-being of all its citizens. The Committee is confident that these goals are achievable and stands ready to assist.

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